
STATUS QUO: EIA PROCESS FOR THE BRAAMHOEK ACCESS ROADS EIA

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PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

The proponent of the project is Eskom Holding (Pty) Ltd

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The purpose of this document is to provide interested and affected parties (I&APs) that have already been registered, with information on the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme Access Roads Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This document will focus on the following:

- The EIA process as of May 2005
- The change of consultants
- The revised EIA process
- Previously raised issues and concerns
- Alternatives considered for the access roads EIA
- The proposed the way forward

THE EIA PROCESS AS OF MAY 2005 AND CHANGE OF CONSULTANTS

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme (BPSS) was compiled and submitted to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) in 1999. The Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism issued a Record of Decision (RoD), approving the proposed Braamhoek PSS on 13 December 2002. Eskom contracted the Braamhoek Consultants Joint Venture (BCJV) to complete the final design of the scheme.

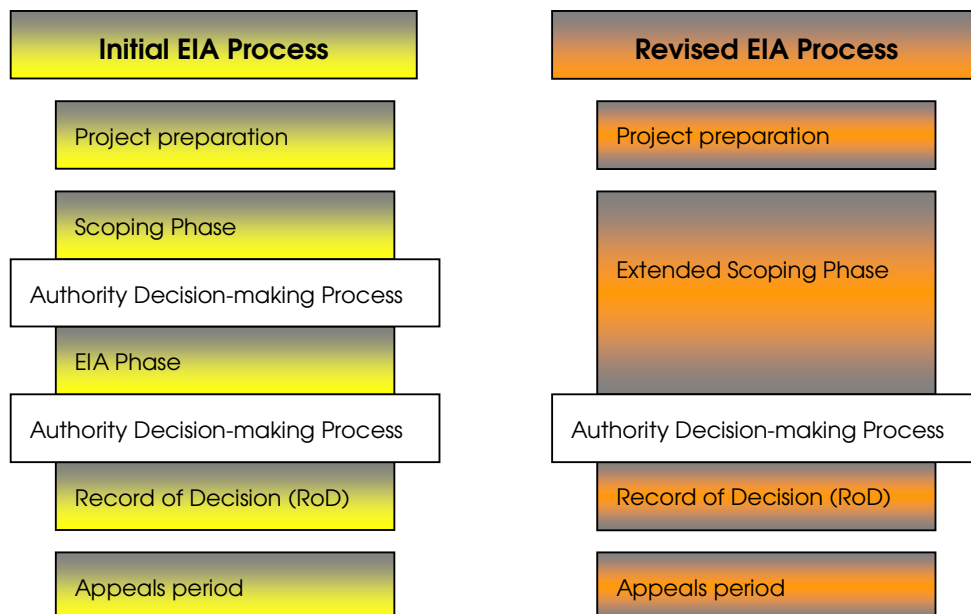
As a condition of the scheme RoD, a separate EIA is required to be undertaken for the access roads. Construction of the roads is planned to commence in July 2006 and construction of the scheme in 2007.

The BCJV was also appointed to carry out the EIA for the access roads. The EIA for the **access roads** commenced in June 2004, and a Plan of Study for the Scoping Phase of this EIA was approved by DEAT in December 2004. During the Scoping Phase, potential environmental impacts of the access roads were identified and interested and affected parties (I&APs) were given the opportunity to provide their comments in the Draft Scoping Report. The Scoping Phase was close to completion when the contract with the Braamhoek Consultants Joint Venture (BCJV) was terminated. The contract was terminated due to uncertainty regarding the independence of the environmental consultants, The BCJV were also involved in design and other activities. Eskom and BCJV decided to take a conservative approach, and Eskom appointed other consultants.

Africon Environment & Sustainability Consulting has been appointed to complete the EIA process that was started by BCJV. Afrosearch Pty (Ltd.), a sub-consultant of Africon, would undertake the Public Participation Process (PPP).

THE REVISED EIA PROCESS

Diagram 1 below provides a graphical representation of the process to be followed.



PREVIOUSLY RAISED ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The issues raised during the previous scoping exercise are being addressed within the continuation of this EIA process. Relevant issues will be investigated as part of the specialist studies. The issues, in general, include:

- Tourism-related issues;
- Agriculture and farming operations;
- Ecological impacts and biodiversity conservation;
- Cultural heritage resource management;
- Social and socio-economic issues;
- Land tenure and compensation;
- Job creation and economic opportunities;
- Project alternatives;
- Technical queries and comments;
 - EIA Process (technical);
 - EIA Process (public participation);

Issues raised during the first phase of scoping, that does not form part of the scope of this project include:

- Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme; and
- Eskom Distribution Queries

THE PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

Africon Environmental & Sustainability Consulting, in collaboration with the National Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), the KwaZulu Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (KZN DAEA) and the Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs (FS DTEEA) agreed to following an Extended Scoping process. The process is explained below:

1. Specialist studies will be conducted by Africon on preliminary issues that were identified during the scoping phase and a review by Africon.
2. The completion of a draft extended scoping report, which will address all environmental impacts identified in the Scoping phase and proposes effective mitigation to address such impacts. This will be made available for public comment.
3. A second round of public participation, conducted by Afrosearch. This round of public participation aims to give feedback to registered I&APs on the EIA process being followed and the findings of the extended scoping process. Comments received during this phase will be incorporated into a final report prior to submission to the relevant authorities.
4. Announcement of the **Record of Decision**.
5. Appeals Period

The Extended Scoping exercise includes detailed specialist investigations of key issues raised during the Scoping Phase. These investigations will include:

Ecological impact (fauna, flora and ecosystems); Surface water; Air quality; Land use; Geology, soils and erosion; Visual and aesthetics; Noise; Heritage resources; and Socio-economic impacts.

The Final Extended Scoping Report (ESR) will be available for public comment from 12 December 2005. The venues at which the document can be viewed include:-

Harrismith Public Library

Ladysmith Public Library

Harrismith Municipality

Ladysmith Municipality

In addition, copies have been made available to the following stakeholders and should be available on request:-

Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs, Free State Department of Agriculture, Free State Conservation Department, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Thabo Mofutsunyane District Municipality, Uthukela District Municipality, Emnambithi/Ladysmith Local Municipality, Maluti a Phofung Local Municipality, Besters Farmers Association, Harrismith District Farmers Union, South African Heritage Resources Agency, Institute for Cultural Resources Management, Wildlife and Environment Society of SA, Middelpunt Wetland Trust, South African National Roads Agency, N3 Toll Concession and Free State Department of Roads.

The proposed way forward does not impede on the public comment periods or any technical components of the environmental impact assessment exercise. After the public comment period, the EIA will be submitted to DEAT for authorisation. The KZN DAEA and FS DTEEA are commenting authorities. The way forward, however, does allow for a shortened process because only one document, an Extended Scoping Report, would be submitted for authorisation.

NOTIFICATION OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public open days and public meetings will be held on the following proposed dates and venues:

- 17 January 2006, Harrismith Public Library, corner of Murray and Warden Streets, Harrismith: public open day from 12:00 to 17:00, followed by a public meeting from 17:30 to 19:30
- 18 January 2006, Ladysmith Town Hall, Murchinson Street, Ladysmith: public open day from 10:00 to 17:00 followed by a public meeting 17:30 to 19:30

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AS PART OF THE ACCESS ROADS EIA

Based on comments received from I & APs during the scoping phase and specifically on the draft scoping report various alternative routes are currently under investigation for the access roads in order to facilitate the construction and operation of the scheme. Please refer to the diagrams at the back of this document for a visual representation of the proposed alternatives.

1.1 ALTERNATIVE 1: BRAAMHOEK

The route follows the Drakensberg Escarpment using the existing track, Braamhoek Pass. The new section of road will link with the existing road network to the south of the Lower Reservoir, where the Provincial Roads 48 (D48) and 275 (D275) will be upgraded to link to the R103 near Besters. The S61 from the Drakensberg Escarpment to Kiesbeen and the S790 between Kiesbeen and Swinburne would be maintained by Eskom during the construction period. This alternative will require the construction of 27 km of new road, and will result in a total road distance of **19 km** between the Lower and Upper Reservoirs (**Figure 1**)

1.2 ALTERNATIVE 2: DE BEERS ESCARPMENT

As in Alternative 1, the D48 and D275 will be upgraded to link to the R103 near Besters. The S61 from the Drakensberg Escarpment to Kiesbeen and the S790 between Kiesbeen and Swinburne would be maintained by Eskom during the construction period. The existing D48 will be upgraded and a new link road along the escarpment will provide a link to the Upper Reservoir site. Another new link road will link D48 to the Lower Reservoir site. The S61 from the Drakensberg Escarpment to Kiesbeen and the S790 between Kiesbeen and Swinburne would be maintained by Eskom during the construction period. This alternative will require the construction of 23 km of new road, and will result in a total road distance of **32 km** between the Lower and Upper Reservoirs (**Figure 2**)

1.3 ALTERNATIVE 3: DE BEERS SKEURKLIP

This alternative will utilise the full length of the S61 and the D48, but will require the full upgrading of these roads. The S922 will provide the link to the Upper Reservoir site. The D48 and D275 will be upgraded to link to the R103 near Besters. The S790 between Swinburne and Kiesbeen would be maintained by Eskom during the

construction period. This alternative will result in a total road distance of **58 km** between the Lower and Upper Reservoirs (**Figure 3**).

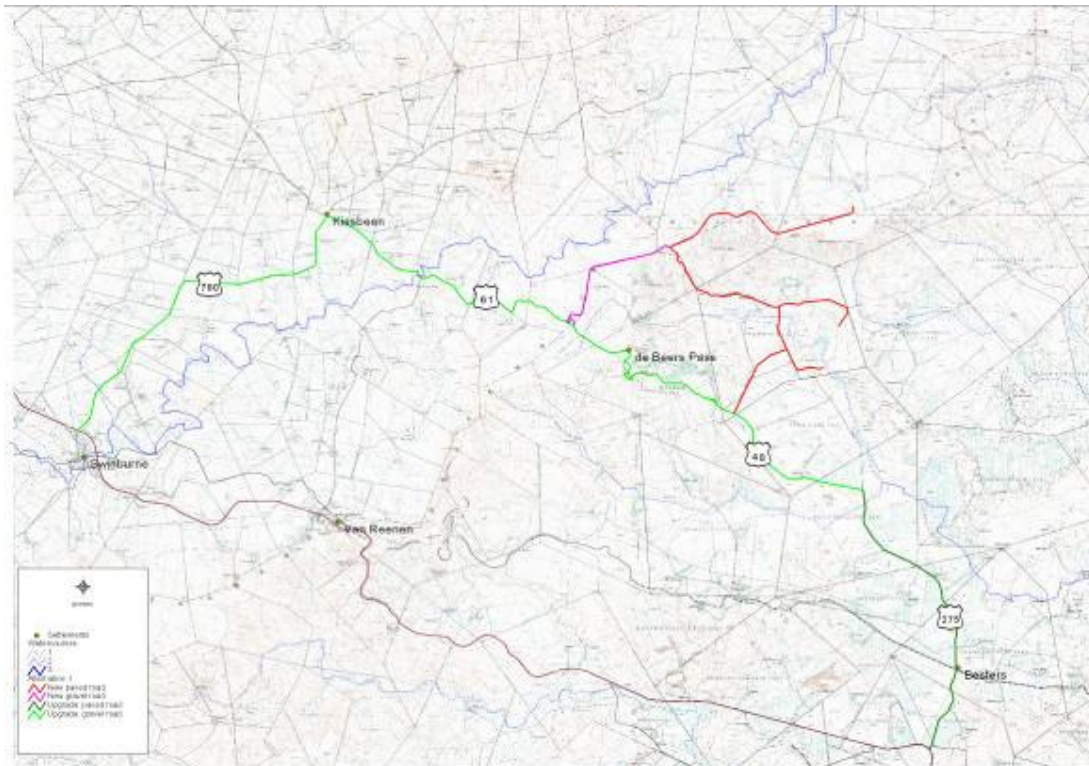


Figure 1 showing Alternative 1, Braamhoek Pass

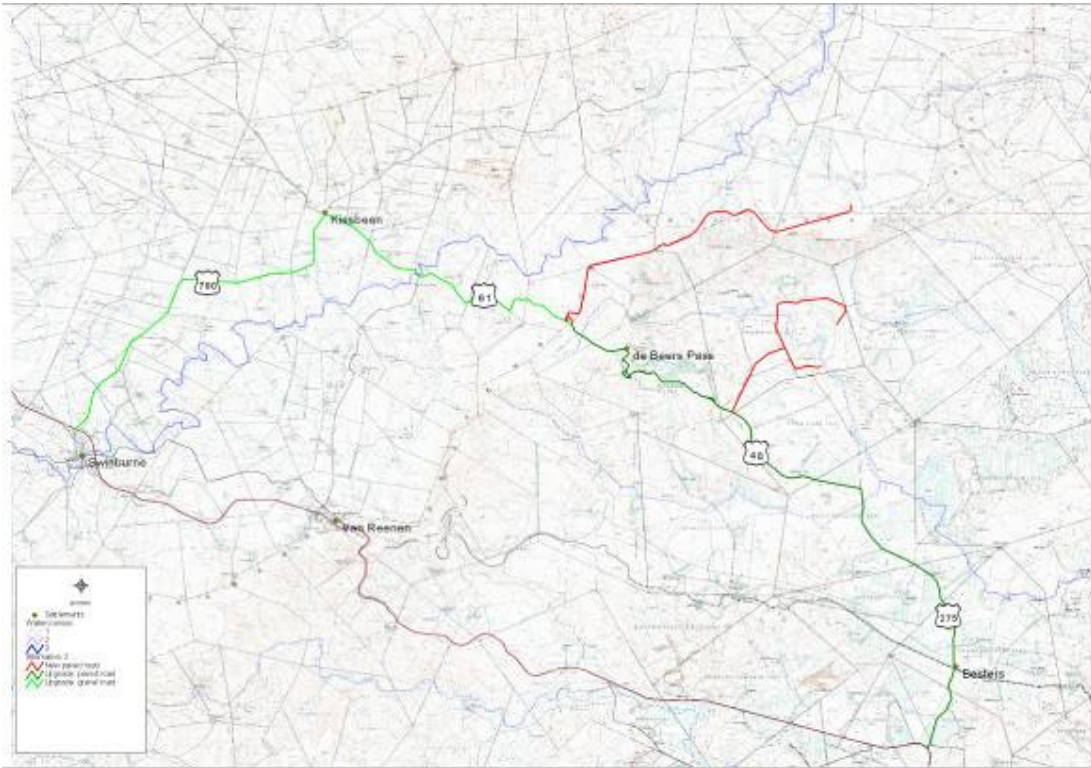


Figure 2 showing Alternative 2, De Beers Pass - Escarpment

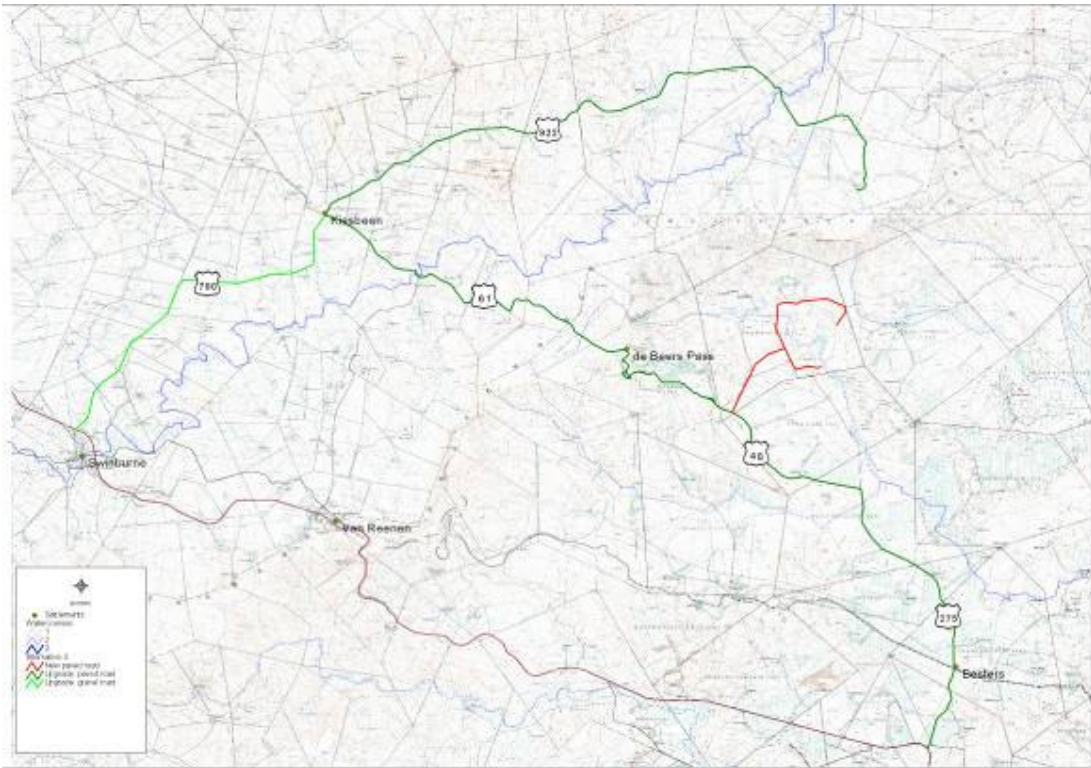


Figure 3 showing Alternative 3, De Beers - Skeurklip.